

Message Text

SECRET

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6904

S E C R E T PEKING 2535

EXDIS

EA PLEASE PASS DAVID DEAN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SWEL, TPHY, CH

SUBJ: EARTHQUAKE PRECAUTIONS

REF: STATE 1462

1. DCM FENN OF UK EMBASSY, AT OUR REQUEST, TALKED TO THOMAS DECEMBER 7 ON BRITISH EARTHQUAKE PRECAUTIONS, WHICH HAVE CAUSED SOME COMMENT AMONG OTHER MISSIONS. FENN SAID THAT REASON FOR BRITISH ACTIVITY WAS THAT THEY HAD BEEN INFORMED BY THEIR RELIABLE "USUAL SOURCE" THAT THE PRC EARTHQUAKE MONITORING SYSTEM IS PREDICTING AN EARTHQUAKE OF AT LEAST 7.0-7.5 ON THE RICHTER SCALE IN THE VICINITY OF PEKING LATE THIS WINTER. THE SOURCE EXPLAINED THAT SEVERAL DAYS WARNING IS EXPECTED IN ADVANCE OF ANY SEVERE QUAKE.

2. THE SOURCE ADDED THAT THIS PREDICTION HAS LEAKED TO CHINESE POPULATION FROM WORKERS IN LOCAL MONITORING STATIONS. IT IS PROBABLY THE SOURCE OF A RECENT PEKING RUMOR AND A JAPANESE PRESS ACCOUNT, PREDICTING AN EARTHQUAKE OF A MAGNITUDE OF OVER 8.0 IN PEKING NEXT SPRING. FENN SAID THAT HE FULLY REALIZES THE LIMITATIONS OF CHINESE PREDICTION ABILITY, WHICH WAS POOR IN CONNECTION WITH THE TANGSHAN QUAKE, BUT THAT AMBASSADOR YOUDE THINKS THAT ALL PRECAUTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

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3. FENN SAID THAT HE HAD DISCUSSED THE POSSIBILITY OF EVACUATION WITH USLO IN THE PAST. ON INSTRUCTIONS FROM LONDON, HE NOW WOULD LIKE TO GET US AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE THAT UK NATIONALS COULD BE INCLUDED IN PLANS FOR EVACUATION OF US NATIONALS IN THE EVENT THAT US SHOULD USE US AIR FORCE AIRCRAFT FOR EVACUATION. HE POINTED OUT THAT US E&E PLANS IN MANY POSTS HAD ALSO INCLUDED UK NATIONALS AND VICE VERSA, AND ADDED THAT THE UK EXPECTS TO STATION AN RAF VC-10 IN HONG KONG WHICH SHOULD BE AVAILABLE FOR POSSIBLE EVACUATION DUTY BY SPRING. FENN SAID THE UK, IF GIVEN ADEQUATE PRIOR WARNING BY THE PRC OF AN IMPENDING EARTHQUAKE, WOULD OF COURSE TRY TO USE COMMERCIAL AIRCRAFT OR CHARTER FLIGHTS FOR EVACUATION. HOWEVER, FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF AN EMERGENCY WITH INSUFFICIENT WARNING, THEY WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT EVERY MEANS OF EVACUATION WAS AVAILABLE. THOMAS TOLD FENN THAT HE WOULD REPORT UK REQUEST TO DEPARTMENT, AND NOTED IT WAS NOT CERTAIN THAT PRC WOULD ALLOW USAF PLANES TO LAND AT PEKING FOR EVACUATION.

4. THIS PREDICTION FROM A RELIABLE CHINESE SOURCE OF A SEVERE EARTHQUAKE APPARENTLY AS ENVISIONED REFTTEL PARA 1 (3) EXPLAINS THE VERY EVIDENT BRITISH ANXIETY ON THIS POINT, AND THEIR EXTENSIVE PREPARATIONS, INCLUDING THE PURCHASE OF ARCTIC TENTS AND MOVING THEIR PERSONNEL DOWN FROM UPPER FLOORS OF APARTMENT BUILDINGS ON A LONG-TERM BASIS. IT ALSO EXPLAINS CONTINUING CONSTRUCTION AND IMPROVEMENT OF THOUSANDS OF EARTHQUAKE SHELTERS BY PEKING RESIDENTS, AND NUMEROUS RUMORS ON THE DIPLOMATIC CIRCUIT OF SERIOUS EARTHQUAKE IN PEKING IN THE SPRING. WE BELIEVE THAT IF WE RECEIVE A WARNING OF AN IMMINENT SERIOUS EARTHQUAKE IN PEKING, WE SHOULD EVACUATE ALL BUT A SKELETON STAFF IMMEDIATELY, PRIOR TO THE QUAKE, AND MOVE THE REMAINDER INTO TENTS OR OTHER EARTHQUAKE-PROOF STRUCTURES. WHILE WE WOULD ORDINARILY TRY TO USE COMMERCIAL TRANSPORTATION, IF TIME DOES NOT PERMIT, WE MAY NEED TO REQUEST USAF AIRCRAFT ON VERY SHORT NOTICE.

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5. A COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENT WITH THE BRITISH APPEARS IN THE INTEREST OF BOTH. IN A PARTICULAR EMERGENCY, EITHER OF US MAY HAPPEN TO BE BETTER ABLE TO PROVIDE EVACUATION OR ASSISTANCE FIRST, AND A FEW HOURS MAY MAKE A VITAL DIFFERENCE.

6. AS A CHEAP INSURANCE POLICY TO PROTECT AMERICANS IN PEKING, WE RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING:

A) THAT THE DEPARTMENT MAKE A STANDBY ARRANGEMENT
FOR USAF EVACUATION OF USLO AND OTHER US PERSONNEL
FROM PEKING IN EVENT OF A WARNING OF AN IMMINENT AND SERIOUS
EARTHQUAKE.

B) THAT WE AGREE IN PRINCIPLE TO INCLUSION OF UK

NATIONALS IN THIS AERIAL EVACUATION PLAN, WITH
DETAILS TO BE WORKED OUT LATER ON A RECIPROCAL ARRANGEMENT.

C) THAT USLO STOCKPILE CERTAIN EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT
SUCH AS TENTS. A SEPARATE MESSAGE WILL GIVE DETAILS
OF OUR REQUIREMENTS.

D) THAT THE DEPARTMENT GET FROM THE OFFICE OF
EARTHQUAKE STUDIES AN UPDATED ASSESSMENT OF THE
POSSIBILITIES AND TIMING OF A SERIOUS EARTHQUAKE IN
THE PEKING AREA. THAT RECEIVED IN STATE 1462 WAS
EXTREMELY HELPFUL. MOREOVER, ANY INFORMATION WE CAN GET
PERIODICALLY ON A CONTINUING BASIS WE WILL APPRECIATE.
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